



# AETC News Clips

## Randolph AFB, Texas



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### **Bush set to visit troops at BAMC**

Web Posted: 12/29/2005 12:00 AM CST

**Sig Christenson**  
**Express-News Military Writer**

President Bush will visit wounded troops New Year's Day at Brooke Army Medical Center, on his first trip to the military hospital as commander-in-chief.

Details of the trip weren't complete Wednesday, but White House spokesman Trent Duffy told reporters in Crawford that Bush will meet with wounded troops, most of them from Iraq.

Bush has traveled to Crawford dozens of times as president. But he has never visited BAMC, which has treated more than 2,300 troops — including scores of burn victims and amputees injured in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"The president travels around the country and the globe to visit with our men and women in uniform, and he seeks every opportunity to thank them for their service," said White House spokesman Blair Jones, when asked about the issue.

Presidential visits to BAMC are rare, with only Bush's father and Lyndon B. Johnson known to have been at the hospital since 1963.

The elder Bush met with troops on Dec. 31, 1989, after the Panama invasion. Johnson, a heart patient, occasionally came to the hospital for tests.

Bush's sole stop in San Antonio as president came last fall, when he received a briefing in the wake of Hurricane Rita at Randolph AFB.

But there have been occasional BAMC visits from other administration officials since the United States invaded Afghanistan.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has been there twice, the first time as part of an Aug. 26, 2003, appearance before the 104th Veterans of Foreign Wars convention.

He also met with wounded troops at BAMC while he was here for the 2004 Army All-American Bowl for high school football standouts, held each January.

Historian T.R. Fehrenbach said the tradition of presidents meeting with wounded troops goes back at least to the time of Lincoln. He called it "partly pro-forma."

"I don't think you're going to get one vote for doing that, but it has a definite effect on morale," he said.

The president's visit to BAMC likely will be similar to nine tours he has made to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington.

*San Antonio Express News*  
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No time for the BAMC visit has been announced, but most if not all of Bush's visits to Walter Reed have come in the afternoon.

The troops, who are recovering from injuries suffered in combat, gather in one ward, with Bush meeting with them and their families individually, Walter Reed spokesman Bill Swisher said.

The president spends as much as two hours at the hospital, he said, and surprises patients and their families by spending more time with them than they expect.

Only Bush, troops, families and the Secret Service are in the room, Swisher said. No media are allowed, he added, and even doctors, nurses and commanders remain outside the room.

"My understanding is that he talks with them at some length and it is more than just a hello and goodbye," Swisher said. "He asked them about their injuries and hears their stories."

Just what will happen Sunday isn't clear. BAMC spokeswoman Nelia Schrum said Bush would meet with wounded troops but could provide few other details.

He could get a tour of BAMC's burn center, which has treated 360 troops since 9-11. Bush also could see the Amputee Care Center, which opened 11 months ago.

Word of the visit sparked fond memories for longtime BAMC employee Carolyn Putnam, 70, who recalled that Johnson's trips to his ranch on the Pedernales River sparked Operation Brooke Tower. The hospital's best doctors, nurses and orderlies mustered on the seventh floor, dubbed the "LBJ Suite," all wearing starched white uniforms and spit-polished shoes.

Johnson didn't always check into the room, which held a commanding view of the city and had been given a makeover by a local interior decorator, Putnam said, noting he sometimes landed a helicopter to pick up a cardiologist en route to Mexico.

But BAMC was ready.

"The best of the best were sent to the seventh floor," she said, "just in case."



# AETC News Clips

## Maxwell AFB, Ala.



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December 28, 2005

### Military profile: Samantha McKenzie

Samantha McKenzie considers herself lucky.

The 20-year-old Huntland, Tenn., native gets to pursue a career in mental health, although it's not in the way she imagined when she was a teenager.

McKenzie is in her third year as an airman first class in the Air Force. Stationed at Maxwell-Gunter Air Force Base, she's a mental health technician in charge of the base's special needs program.

"It is a lot of responsibility," McKenzie said of her job.

McKenzie said she grew up in a military family, with her grandfather, uncle, brother-in-law and sister all serving at one time or another.

"I actually used to be anti-military," she said. "My sister was having some issues with the Navy and child care. But I began talking to some Air Force folks we knew and, before long, I was signing up."

Following basic training -- which McKenzie describes as "not that bad" -- she was stationed in Montgomery. Initially, she didn't think she'd be allowed to work in mental health, something she said she's always found interesting.

"I was supposed to be a dental technician," she said. "The day I was supposed to leave, I got a call saying that I could leave that day if I wanted to be a mental health technician. I got very lucky with this job."

McKenzie plans to finish her bachelor's degree in psychotherapy and pursue a career in the Air Force. Her hope is to someday go to Officer Training School.

"This is a great place to be stationed if you want to work on your education or be an officer," she said.

"This is definitely a good base."

--Crystal Bonvillian

*Montgomery Advertiser*

**PAGE: Internet**

**DATE: 29 Dec 05**



# AETC News Clips

## WHMC, Lackland AFB, Texas



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### **Capt. James S. Eadie: Media ignoring all the George Baileys on Iraq's front lines**

Web Posted: 12/29/2005 12:00 AM CST

#### **Capt. James S. Eadie**

The emergency rooms in Iraq can be eerily quiet or suddenly explode into a flurry of action, such as the day a Bradley troop carrier was hit by a roadside bomb, engulfing the occupants in flame and twisted metal. As an emergency physician, these are the days I trained for, but dread to see.

The tent hospital shook as the Blackhawk helicopters landed with seven injured soldiers. They had blast injuries from the explosion, shrapnel wounds and extensive burns across their arms, legs and faces. The sight was horrific.

I focused on one soldier who was the most severely injured. His face, arms and legs were severely burned. His gloves were welded to his fingers by the heat, though he remained conscious and able to talk. His concern was for his men. "How are they doing?" he repeatedly asked.

I encouraged him to hang on. I told him his men were in good hands and getting the care they needed; everything would be all right. I desperately wanted to believe it, but my experience as a physician told me otherwise.

Before he was placed on a ventilator, he said the Bradley had been hit. The large troop door was damaged and could not be opened, trapping the men inside. The only escape was through a small front door.

What he didn't tell us but we later learned was that he had gotten out with minimal burns, but then went back into the vehicle to rescue his trapped comrades. This soldier had sustained severe burns in the process of single-handedly saving the lives of his fellow soldiers. In spite of our efforts, he died days later. He had given his life to save others.

As one of the doctors later captured it, "We met a hero last night."

I often reflect during the holidays on the classic story of George Bailey in "It's a Wonderful Life." I, too, find myself standing at that metaphoric bridge wondering if I have made a difference here in Iraq. Is the poignant story still valid? The answer for me is a resounding yes.

I met the first of many heroes on the night of the Bradley accident. The courage and sacrifice of this soldier is not isolated; it is the norm here, a daily occurrence. What I have witnessed has profoundly affected me. I was completely unprepared for this.

Why had I never heard these stories at home? As a physician in a stateside military hospital, certainly I should have heard these stories, but either I had not listened or, more likely, they were not told. The news that I was accustomed to at home seems but a shell of what I see before me.

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**PAGE: Internet**

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Every day, I meet ordinary men and women displaying profound compassion for each other and doing extraordinary things. I cared for a Marine who dove onto an enemy grenade, shielding his men from the blast and saving their lives. He lost his hand, took multiple shrapnel wounds and was in critical condition, yet all he wanted to know was how his comrades were doing.

I spoke with another Marine who stayed on patrol during the constitutional election, instead of seeking medical attention for a gunshot wound he sustained to his arm two days prior. When I asked him why he had delayed medical attention, he said the election was the next day, he had a job to do and he would not let his men down — his arm could wait.

Before I deployed to Iraq, I opened the paper and saw little of these heroic acts. Where are the front-page stories on my fellow soldiers and Marines? I wish the public and our policy-makers could look into the eyes of these soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines and see what I see — hope and commitment. I see it every day. They have burning hope behind their eyes, deep compassion in their hearts and a steadfast belief that each one is making a difference.

As I celebrate the holiday season here in Iraq, I am filled with a great sense of wonder and appreciation for what our men and women in uniform have volunteered to do. They have answered the call of their country, and they have served with dignity, pride and honor. It has been a tremendous privilege for me to be able to care for these true American heroes.

This holiday season I do not need to watch "It's A Wonderful Life," for I have come face to face with many George Baileys.

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*James S. Eadie, a captain in the Air Force, is a Harvard Medical School-trained emergency physician stationed at Wilford Hall Medical Center in San Antonio. He is deployed to the 332nd Expeditionary Aeromedical Evacuation Flight at Balad Air Base, Iraq.*

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**PAGE: Internet**

**DATE: 29 Dec 05**